DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 237 368 SE 043 662

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TITLE Why Chess in the Schools.
PUB DATE [83]
NOTE 11p.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Competition; *Educational Games; Elementary Secondary Education; *Learning Activities; Mathematics Education; Problem Solving; *Recreational Activities
IDENTIFIERS *Chess

ABSTRACT

The game of chess is recommended as a school activity. In addition to requiring that individuals become actively involved in a mentally demanding competition, its effects are stimulating, wholesome, and healthy. Several benefits accrue from the teaching and promoting of chess in schools. Chess limits the element of luck (teaching the importance of planning), requires that reason be coordinated with instinct (it is an effective decision-teaching activity), is an endless source of satisfaction (the better one plays, the more rewarding it becomes), and it is a highly organized recreational activity with clubs (leagues, team play) and elaborate systems of local, national, and international governance. In addition, chess is an international language such that players will find a friendly reception in any of the thousands of chess clubs throughout the world. A brief description of the game, comments on its appeal, and techniques to support chess in schools are provided. Techniques suggested include providing opportunities to learn and practice chess in clubs, intramural competition, credit/non-credit classes, and in teams which represent the school in inter-school competition. (JN)

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# WHY CHESS IN THE SCHOOLS

by

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Chess belongs in schools. In these days of passive, mind-deadening leisure time activities, of substance abuse, and of shortages of resources, chess is available as a superior form of recreation. Chess requires that individuals become actively involved in a mentally demanding competition; its effects are stimulating, wholesome, and healthy. Chess is inexpensive. It does not require energy consuming machines, elaborate facilities, or costly equipment.

The game of chess

For a great many people, chess is the finest of all two-handed games. It is an intellectual competition played on a board of sixty-four squares. Each participant commands sixteen pieces: eight pawns, two knights, two bishops, two rooks, a queen, and a king. Each player can be likened to a general controlling an army engaged in exciting battles and compelling struggles.

Chess is one of few games in which nothing is hidden. All the pieces are in view on the board; the game is won by logically demonstrating a deeper understanding of the positions than the opponent. The winner of a game has the satisfaction of having defeated someone in a pure battle of wits.

The origins of chess have been traced back thousands of years. A form of chess similar

to the modern game was known in India 1,300 years ago. The rules of modern chess were adopted 500 years ago and have remained unchanged to this day. The game is played throughout the world with its popularity continuing to increase.

The possible number of moves in all the possible games of chess is beyond comprehension - more than there are molecules in the solar system. After both players have made their first ten moves of a chess game, together they have selected only twenty of a possible 169,518,829,100,500,000,000,000,000,000 moves. Mathematicians have estimated that if chess were continued to be played at the present rate, only five percent of its possibilities will have been worked out when the sun explodes.

The appeal of chess

Although many believe that chess is too difficult for the average person, it is not true that one has to be "brainy" to play the game. There are millions of chess players throughout the world and most of them are ordinary people of average intelligence. The most successful chess clubs and school programs are those which provide opportunities for competition for players of all levels of ability. Interest in chess can be generated in all groups of students regardless of cultural or economic

background. Aptitude for the game is not restricted to the more scholarly students.

Most chess players are unable to create the strategic ideas and deep combinations of the top players, but their enjoyment of the game played at their level of ability is just as satisfying. The ordinary player can appreciate and enjoy the the beauty of master play. The amazing combinations and precise strategies of master games can provide hours of entertainment as well as excellent instruction for ordinary players. The game scores of most master level tournaments and matches are published (sometimes within hours) throughout the world. Even though thousands of volumes of annotated master games, analysis, and instruction are available, the ordinary player's primary reward comes from playing games against opponents of similar ability.

Many people who do not play chess see only the players bent forward staring intently at a variety of pieces arranged on a checkerboard with only occasional action when pieces are moved. However, this concept is as false as most stereotypes. Besides the quiet intensity of tournament games, many forms of chess are fast and sometimes noisy, such as: blitz, ten-second, five-minute, and 30/30 games. The normal game conducted in elementary and secondary schools may be played within the discipline

of the rules, but the customs of silence and concentration often give way to a variety of body movements and verbalization as the players express their feelings of joy, anguish, and excitement. To the players, the game is like an unfolding drama. Tension builds and a crisis is reached which decides whether or not there will be a happy ending. The players live through the emotions of an exciting story.

Chess has a powerful aesthetic appeal. The best chess games are works of art. They are the products of original and creative thinking. Chess sets and boards as art objects are a dimension of chess aesthetics as are short stories, novels, cartoons, and paintings with chess themes. The major aesthetic appeal of chess is the efficiency, the precision, the power, and the originality of the tactics and strategy of the game itself. Thousands of chess books, magazines, and other media are produced each year, most of which are devoted to this basic dimension of chess aesthetics. The beauty of chess is as compelling and pleasure giving as any other art form. The endless opportunities for creating new combinations in chess are perhaps comparable to painting or composing music.

The benefits of chess

Several benefits accrue from the teaching and promoting of chess in schools: (1) Chess limits

the element of luck; it teaches the importance of planning. (2) Chess requires that reason be coordinated with instinct; it is an effective decision teaching activity. (3) Chess is an endless source of satisfaction; the better one plays the more rewarding it becomes. (4) Chess is a highly organized recreation with clubs, leagues, rating systems, tournaments, postal competition, team play, a massive literature, and elaborate systems of local, national and international governance. (5) Chess is an international language; players will find a friendly reception in any of the thousands of chess clubs throughout the world. In these days of great population mobility, the schools should be educating people to easily adjust to relocations. Social entry through a chess club is available in nearly every city in the world.

As a home game hobby, chess can provide relaxation and recreation. It can be a lifelong source of interest, amusement, and satisfaction. Chess provides more long term benefits than most school sports. Enjoyment of chess can flower throughout a lifetime. Age, infirmity, or station in life does little to reduce a person's ability to participate.

For those who wish to pursue chess seriously, the opportunity for scholarship is limitless. For those who become fascinated and who achieve greater and greater success, chess can come to resemble a passion. Chess masters subject themselves to much the same kind of discipline as that of great music composers. Success at the highest levels in both art forms comes from: constant practice and study; memorizing; trying new ideas; developing a unique style; holding to an unwavering faith in personal ability; and genius.

Chess, mathematics, and music produce prodigies. Morphy, Capablanca, and Reshevsky, three of the best chess players of all time, were confounding opponents and onlookers with the precision and depth of their moves by the age of ten. For them, it was instinctive genius, just as it was with the ten year old Gauss or Mozart.

Proficiency in chess seems to be related to inherent logic, problem solving ability, temperament, versatility in thinking, competitiveness, and appreciation for the beauty of the game. Why some people are better chess players than others remains as much a mystery as the reasons for excellence in any mental endeavor. The deeper one's understanding of chess, the more it becomes an

exercise in sheer intellect. Games at the highest level of competition become contests of imagination with the element of chance reduced to near zero.

A chess player's vision is not measured so much by the number of moves seen ahead but by the ability to see a series of moves as a unity. The clarity with which a player of world championship caliber conceptualizes has always been a distinguishing characteristic. To the top chess players, each game is an original creation. The best players use the principles of good play as a framework in which to build new patterns of thought. The great chess masters break precedents and think the unthinkable. The player who is guided only by experience will never be as great as the one who treats each game as a completely new construction.

The element of fight in chess is found in the basic objective of the game: to entrap (checkmate) the opponent's king, and in the struggle to win more of the opponent's pieces than are lost. The language of chess is filled with expressions usually associated with violence. Chess provides a non-violent outlet for the urge to mayhem. Essentially, chess represents a sublimation of aggressive drives. Everyone has feelings of violence; everyone likes a fight, but chess, like so much that makes man civilized, turns destructive drives into

beneficial activity.

The conduct of chess games is as varied as the personalities of the players. Aggressive players attempt to mount fierce attacks. Defensive players tend to build solid walls in the hope that the opponents will dash themselves to pieces in their attacks. A majority of players shift their style from aggressive to defensive depending on the situation.

Tournament chess is physically very demanding. The best players make special efforts to remain in good physical condition. Tournament chess is played with a fixed time limit which adds to the requirements of rigorous concentration and self discipline.

How to support chess

Schools can provide opportunities for students to learn and practice chess through clubs, intramural competition, credit and non-credit classes, and teams which represent the school in inter-school competition. If no one on the staff is able to teach chess, often a chess enthusiast in the community can be found to help get a program started.

Once a few students learn the game, a minimum of support and encouragement will cause the program to grow. The best players in a school club

will be eager to recruit additional members.

Support for a chess program consists of obtaining sufficient boards and sets, possibly a few books, and if competition gets serious, a few chess clocks. Miscellaneous supplies required are minimal. Making time for practice, instruction, club meetings, and matches is the most valuable support chess players can receive. When compared to the cost of other programs, chess is a bargain.

Chess success is an intellectual achievement appropriate for schools. It belongs in schools because: it is a fascinating game; it can provide a lifetime hobby; it has international appeal; it requires a minimum of resources; and, it demands that participants exercise their best powers of planning, memory, decision-making, judgment, creativity, and concentration. For these reasons alone, all schools should be providing opportunities for the learning and practice of chess.